A NATURAL PAIRING:
SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THEATRE EDUCATION

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2018

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

A NATURAL PAIRING: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THEATRE EDUCATION

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE COLLEGE OF ARTS

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION IN THEATRE EDUCATION

BY

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COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

2018

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May 2018

ABSTRACT

Social justice curricula are often solely geared toward middle and high school students. I intend to prove that a social justice curriculum can be creatively paired with a theatre curriculum. I also intend to prove that social justice can be taught as young as pre-kindergarten. I will design a social justice curriculum for various grade levels, beginning with pre-kindergarten. Through research and age-appropriate strategies, I will develop curriculum goals and learning experiences for all grade levels. The curriculum is not an end point for teachers, but rather a starting point for theatre teachers who want to integrate social justice into their curriculum. Learning experiences will be tied to Teaching Tolerance's Social Justice standards. Although defining social justice is a complicated process, for the purpose of this paper I will define social justice as the process and the goal of achieving equity in a democratic society.

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my children, Solomon and Sarai. May you always surround yourself with people who love and support you.

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Introduction

Theatre has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. The nerve-wracking feelings before the performance are a welcomed part of the path that leads to the overwhelming sense of accomplishment I feel during the curtain call. They are inseparable parts of the package. Theatre teaches me who I am and shows me what I am capable of accomplishing. It is one of the most powerful educational and empowering vehicles that exist.

When I was younger, I didn't consciously consider how to make theatre an even more powerful tool. I just willingly participated and longed for the next opportunity. As a theatre educator, I am always looking for a way to make a bigger impact with my students; ways to help them connect the usually fictional world of children's theatre with the real world that they live and breathe; ways to honor their individual identities while collectively working for the whole. It's a difficult task. Add to that difficulty, the fact that I, an emigrated Caribbean-American female, co-teach in a predominantly white upper-class school. How do I emphasize the importance of identity without further ostracizing myself or my fellow students of color?

It feels like I've known my entire life that I'm a member of a marginalized population. The plays I watch do not reflect my life or my culture. I have to work harder to find simple products for my hair. My history is talked about in hushed tones as if the mention of slavery or the civil rights movement would offend me. I've accepted that status as I've accepted and love my brown skin, but recently I've begun to reject the idea that continued marginalization is a way of life for future generations. I fight this idea by creating an awareness in my students about marginalized and oppressed people and situations. Not everyone enjoys the same democratic

privileges as we do in the United States. Not every person in the United States has the same history and culture. Young students need to know about these injustices if they are to be the hope of the future that we claim they are. By continually reading diverse literature and immersing myself in conversations with people that are located differently than myself (politically, culturally, and economically, not necessarily geographically), I am able to find age-appropriate ways to approach diversity, equity, inclusion, multiculturalism, and social justice in the theatre classroom.

Location Affects Social Justice

I teach at an independent school that prides itself on being unique. On average we have about 400 students in preschool through 8th grade. We are situated in an affluent area of Georgia, with close proximity to Atlanta. Parents and teachers joke that we are the "hippie school" because we don't have bells to signify the end of the school day, we don't denote grades on report cards until 8th grade, classes are multi-grade, we avoid worksheets whenever possible, teachers have autonomy of their curricula, Earth Day is a community-wide event, and many more unique characteristics. The highlight of our hippie-like nature may be that students learn and play inside as much as they do outside on our 40-acre campus. Our school is often considered a bubble that is unlike the surrounding community.

Even though our progressive school is located in the suburbs, it is still in Georgia which is undeniably a part of the South. The progressive values that our school embraces can be at odds with the inherent conservative values of our community at large. Promoting a multicultural education is an easy sell, but anything beyond that (i.e. equity, inclusion, social justice) is often encountered with a meeting asking you to slow down your efforts.

In the 2016-2017 school year, my co-teacher and I framed our season around the theme "Tales from Around the World." Halfway through the year, I realized that we could never again produce a year of only white American male playwrights. The effort that we put into that multicultural year would somehow have to be repeated in each year that followed. That commitment grew as I attended the People of Color Conference (POCC) in December of 2016 in Atlanta, GA and 2017 in Anaheim, CA. The People of Color Conference, hosted by the National Association of Independent Schools, is a national gathering of faculty and staff of color, as well as white allies. The workshops and keynote speakers provide tools for people of color and allies alike to work toward equity, inclusion, and justice in their schools.

I also attended a peer-led professional development program hosted by the National SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) Project in Marlborough, MA in July 2017. This training encourages storytelling and sharing of stories across gender, culture, racial, class, and nationality lines in an effort for people to check their emotional baggage and more fully commit to the work of equity and justice in their programs. These experiences have created an awareness in me that I want to share with my students because they have the power to change the world and shape the future with the awareness we create in them now. I found it necessary to expand my vocabulary to properly encapsulate my newfound goals and interests. I became magnetized to words like equity, inclusion, diversity, multiculturalism, and finally social justice. I thought my only challenge would be time. As a theatre teacher, I only see my students for 30-45 minutes per class period, once or twice a week. I have so many standards to hit in a short amount of time – how can I successfully add more content to my curriculum? Later on we'll explore what other challenges arose and how they can be faced individually and institutionally.

Why social justice?

I see social justice as an umbrella and the aforementioned terms of equity, inclusion, diversity, multiculturalism fall under that umbrella like spokes. Social justice is both ill-defined and overused. It can be hard to champion a topic that you need to define in each conversation. It is unlikely that one will find a unanimously agreed upon definition for social justice. In their article *Social Justice as a Conduit for Broadening Curriculum Access,* Melanie Martin and Jabulani Ngcobo refer to social justice as both a process and a goal (89). The goal of social justice is equity and it is achieved through the process of collective work as opposed to any individual's actions. In addition to that, I consider social justice a facet of our education process that can be interwoven in the curricula or taught outright. Theatre is one such passion that needs to be considered in the discussion along with the more obvious choices like Language Arts and Social Studies. I hope to create a better understanding of social justice in the upcoming chapters.

The middle or high school teacher can quickly find sources to incorporate social justice work into their curriculum. However, it is not quite as easy for elementary theatre teachers to find pre-existing plans to infuse social justice into their classroom. This paper seeks to bridge the divide in social justice curriculum in early childhood theatre education. I will provide proposals for social justice curriculum for lower years. My proposals will reflect the nontraditional age groupings of my school – specifically preschool/pre-kindergarten, kindergarten/first grade, second/third grade, and fourth/fifth grade. Although I teach sixth through eighth grade as well, I did not include proposals for those grades because there are various resources to pull lesson plans and curricula for those age groups (Teaching Tolerance, Anti-Defamation League, Edutopia and many more).

Theatre content and standards are paramount to a theatre arts teacher. So how do theatre arts teachers find the time to integrate social justice concepts into their early years curricula

without sacrificing the content and standards they hold dear? Moreover, why should they take the time to make these small and large changes to their curricula? The answer is easy. Because we have to. Our world is constantly changing. As of 2016, immigration numbers were on the rise every year, but acts of racism are also on the rise. According to CNN Politics, "Thousands of hate crimes -- 6,121 -- were reported to the FBI in 2016…That's up from 5,850 reported hate crime incidents in 2015. The figures are based on over 1,500 incident reports from law enforcement agencies around the country" (Petulla, Kupperman and Schneider). Excluding the data from 2016, the number of reported hate crimes has been decreasing since 1992 (Petulla, Kupperman and Schneider). In addition to racism and xenophobia, socioeconomic issues will continue to exist while young students can be heard in the hallway commenting that the new kid looks poor. We have to help our students co-exist peacefully despite the turmoil around them. Social justice education gives us the tools to meet that goal.

Even small children are aware of polarizing topics that we can't talk about, but they feel they should have an opinion about. As educators, we have a chance to influence this young generation of learners to consider their actions or lack of actions as they move through the world. Social justice education teaches us how to have conversations about these polarizing topics and gain understanding about each other.

As a member of a marginalized population, there are obviously times when I feel oppressed, invisible, and eliminated from the curriculum or community. As educators, we should want to ensure that our students never have to feel this way. Now is a great time for this study, because our country is in visible, almost tangible, chaos due to a divisive election and international discord. It doesn't matter who you voted for, the divide between the parties and various nations became a chasm. We can bring peace into our students' lives by bringing

awareness and consequently empowerment. When you are looking at the chasm and you don't know what to do, then you feel helpless and you disconnect from the situation. Rather than feel disconnected, we want our future leaders to feel knowledgeable, empowered, and ready to answer the call to action when it occurs.

Reframing social justice in the theatre classroom

My exploration of social justice and theatre education includes both research and action. My desire to combine the two comes from a firm belief that it can be done successfully in a way that is beneficial to the students, the teachers, the families, and the school community. In my opinion there are not enough resources providing information for preschool through grade five. The canon narrows significantly when you add theatre education in the mix. My research aims to bridge the gap in the research and inspire theatre education teachers to incorporate social justice work in their classroom without sacrificing their content. The curriculum proposals in Chapter Four can also be used as a starting point for traditional classroom teachers to incorporate social justice in their curricula. Neither social justice nor my proposals are an all-or-nothing approach. Teachers should feel free to use all, some, or none of the ideas. As an independent school, we are not required to adhere to any state standards. However, my proposals will include applicable Social Justice Standards from Teaching Tolerance.

Chapter 1 – Creating a Common Goal

As stated in the introduction, it's very difficult to work toward a common goal for a cause when the cause itself is undefined. Children are taught at a young age, to pledge allegiance to the flag including a claim for liberty and justice for all. When do they learn to identify what justice looks like? In an interview, author James A. Banks challenges teachers to change their curriculum, its perspectives, as well as its assumptions to help transform the thinking of our students (28). Most curricula in America is Eurocentric and does not reflect the true melting pot that is America. Many schools are so focused on exploring the traditional canon of dramatic literature, that they are satisfied in producing years of plays written by white American or European playwrights or about white American or European families. They don't give a second thought to how exclusive this practice is to students of color. This is just one example of the injustice that exists in schools today.

Because social justice is so multi-faceted, it is much more common for scholars and experts to break social justice into parts than it is to find a meaningful, agreed upon definition. Allan Ornstein also observed that social justice means different things to different people. "If you are going to speak or write about social justice you will need to have some understanding of what is a democracy, what rights do people have or should have, and how society should provide for less fortunate people" (546). Ornstein has authored over 65 books, and several of them have been on the topic of social justice. In his article *Social Justice: History, Purpose, Meaning,* he identifies 30 principles that he believes should be considered when defining social justice. Although 30 principles are far too many to be considered a definition, I will highlight the principles that I consider to be key to social justice education.

2. Ordinary people can change the course of history by joining a movement. Social justice is a movement for improving the lives of people.

6. In a just society, all lives have equal value, equal opportunity and equal chances for success. (546)

8. …. in a just society, bias and discrimination are minimal and minority groups have the same rights as the majority and are able to fulfill their dreams.

20. In a just society, those who have the least benefit from those who have the most via charity works, philanthropy, and in fair tax code.

21. Although a dominant and subordinate group may exist in all societies, in a just society, the differences do not lead to institutional racism, class consciousness, or economic warfare.

25. In a just society, the majority of people must be committed to a level playing field, and some legitimate form of equality, even if it means that income and wealth will be redistributed to less fortunate people. (547)

30. Words count. … It recognizes and supports poetry, plays, songs, speeches and film, as well as the publication of newspapers, magazines and books as essential for the health and vitality of society. Words can be used for waging war or for healing. (548)

It's noteworthy that his last principle supports theatre as medium for war or healing. Performing, exploring, or writing dramatic literature that reflects that ills or the "vitality" of society definitely allows for "both reflection and revolution" (Ornstein 548). Ornstein's principles of social justice can easily be viewed as a description of a just society, as opposed to a definition of social justice itself. He does note that "finding the

right mechanism, reaching some compromise…is no easy task" (548). This is no doubt due to the fact that achieving social justice means undoing inherent institutional oppression. It also requires those with money and power to be willing to sacrifice money and power in the name of fairness and equity. Ornstein closes with the thought that "Every generation going forward is obligated to interpret and reinterpret the principles of human rights and justice." Although Ornstein adamantly states the 30 principles, it is clear that it is the members of society and not the principles themselves that maintain justice and fairness within a given population (548). Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere…Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly" (Letter from the Birmingham Jail). According to Ornstein's view, it is our responsibility as members of society to put forth the work to ensure justice and eradicate injustice everywhere.

In the article *Civic Republicanism and Education: Democracy and Social Justice in School*, Itay Snir and Yuval Eylon offer a more concise and somewhat contradictory view to social justice. They bring government into the equation, reminding us that the "state enforces a legal order that in many ways shapes the relations among citizens, hence it must be asked whether this order promotes or prevents social justice" (590). Ornstein places the responsibility of social justice in the hands of the citizens, while Snir and Eylon place the responsibility on the government entities that create and reinforce the systems we live in. This theory has value when we consider that social justice is connected with equality and existing laws can prevent true equality. Again, as we search for a definition we are left empty-handed. Snir and Eylon only provided us with an idea of who might be responsible for achieving social justice.

The word equality consistently resurfaces in this discussion. Although equal distribution of resources is an issue, for the purposes of this paper, I am not addressing social justice from that standpoint. That is not to ignore the unequal distribution of funding, books and programs that schools have to suffer due to the low socioeconomic status of the surrounding residents, but due to the focus of teaching social justice in a theatre education program so students feel empowered to take action.

Martin and Ncgobo, who defined social justice as a process and a goal, noted that "social justice education aims to broaden access to and in the social, political and economic goods available in a particular society" (90). Although this is not a definition of social justice itself, it does clarify the purpose of social justice education. By increasing the awareness of our learners to the ills of society, we are allowing our students to be active citizens of our democratic society. Although every school has their own definition of what an active citizen looks like, in *What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy,* Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne argue there are three types of citizens: 1) the personally-responsible citizen who demonstrates "personal responsibility by emphasizing, honesty, integrity, self-discipline and hard work"; 2) the participatory citizen who engages in "collective, community-based efforts"; and 3) the justice-oriented citizen who responds to issues by "critically analyzing and addressing the social issues and injustices" (238-242). Recognizing that we are promoting three types of citizenship is respectful to the various types of learners we have in our classroom. Outside of their classrooms, we need people to donate flowers to the community garden bed and possibly volunteer (personally-responsible); organize a community-wide event to raise awareness for the event (participatory); and lobby for more green space in the community (justice-oriented). Social

justice education helps to promote all these types of citizenship simply by bringing awareness to the issues and inequities that exist in an age-appropriate way.

Cherry A. McGee Banks and James Banks echo Westheimer and Kahne's assertion that building reflective and active citizens is the foundation of our democratic society.

> "Pedagogies that merely prepare students to fit into society and to experience social class mobility within existing structures – which are characterized by pernicious class divisions and racial, ethnic, and gender stratification – are not helpful in building a democratic and just society. An education for equity enables students not only to acquire basic skills but to use those skills to become effective agents for social change" (McGhee Banks and Banks 152).

Educators are not preparing students for this current society, we are preparing them to lead a just society. Therefore, our practices must shift to accommodate the world we want them to live in and the world in its current state. Our classrooms should reflect social justice practices as we wish they would look in the world. When students recognize and desire social justice in their world, they are more likely to recognize instances and circumstances of injustice in the world at large. We as teachers can teach them what social justice could look like on a small scale so they will demand it on a larger scale. It is definitely a group effort, and requires teachers and school to work together and believe in this cause.

For the purposes of this paper, social justice is defined as the process and the goal of achieving equity in a democratic society. Social justice education creates active citizens (personally-responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented) that work to achieve equity making that democratic society a just society as well. In *Understanding Education for Social Justice,* Kathy Hytten and Silvia Bettez share that some educators see a connection between social justice

and the purpose of education in a democratic society, that "… education should help to promote the knowledge and skills needed for thoughtful citizenship" (19). Conservatives and liberals may have different views about how equity and equality manifests itself in a democratic society. Banks emphasizes the importance of recognizing that conservatives also have the right to express their opinion, adding that "the right by a group to express its views within a democracy does not mean that all views should have equal power to influence the civic community. In a democratic, just society, all views cannot have equal weight" (Banks, On Educating for Diversity: A Conversation with James A. Banks 31). Education develops thoughtful citizens who respect each other's opinions even if they disagree. These concepts should be emphasized in any curriculum, but especially in social justice education.

Chapter 2 – The Academics of Social Justice

Social justice education fosters the same skills as noted in Lee A. Scott's 21st Century Skills Early Learning Framework Report. The Framework breaks down 21st Century Skills into Learning and Innovation, Life and Career Skills as well as Information, Media and Technology. In *Beyond the Illusion of Diversity, How Early Childhood Teachers can Promote Social Justice*, Gloria Swindler Boutte emphasizes the importance of connecting academics and social justice. "A social justice curriculum should be academically rigorous and should prepare students for the world in which they live and for the future" (170). A social justice curriculum, or theatre arts curriculum infused with social justice as we are discussing here can still be academically rigorous and even help students obtain 21st Century Skills.

Although social justice education fits neatly into the 21st Century Skills categories, I will only make connections with the Learning and Innovation framework which is further broken down into the 4Cs of Learning (Creativity and Innovation, Critical Thinking and Problem

Solving, Communication, and Collaboration). There are several Creativity and Innovation outcomes that can easily occur in social justice education:

- Creates new and worthwhile ideas (both incremental and radical concepts) where children engage in evaluating the value and relevance of their ideas
- Develops new ideas and communicates them to others.
- Is open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives (Scott 4)

Scott notes that the environment of an early learning classroom "supports both creativity and innovation" (4). Creativity and innovation are imperative in social justice education. There is a focus on breaking the paradigms that have us stuck in an unjust society. We need new ideas and diverse perspectives to achieve that goal. Younger children get excited with role dramas where the teacher pretends to have a problem and needs a new idea to solve it. This classroom activity, directly relates to Problem-Solving as well but it requires creativity and innovation in order for the role drama to be effective.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving is the second of the 4Cs. Identifying and breaking down systemic oppression requires critical thinking and problem solving. It takes time to identify the many systems that are broken, but reflection and analysis are key components of that work. In a solo article, Hytten explains that democracy is based on problem solving and "continually working to bring about more enriching, enabling and just conditions. To teach for social justice is to engage the very real struggles that exist in the world around us in classrooms and in the broader life of schools" (441). Part of critical thinking and problem solving, is understanding that your way of thinking is one of many. This understanding, which is required to achieve social justice, takes practice. The classroom provides opportunities to practice that on a daily basis. Several of the Critical Thinking and Problem Solving learning outcomes that Scott identified

support this concept (6). However, if we don't expose our children to fresh viewpoints and the problems that need solving, we are cheating them of the opportunity to identify and bring about change. Some of those learning outcomes include:

- Uses a wide range of problem-solving techniques
- Analyzes how parts of a whole interact with each other to produce overarching complex systems
- Analyzes and evaluates major alternative points of view
- Reflects critically on learning experiences and processes
- Solves different kinds of non-familiar problems in both conventional and innovative ways (6).

The third component of Learning and Innovation Skills is Communication. In order to make change, you have to be able to clearly communicate the injustices that you have observed, experienced or researched. The people in power as well as the allies who will assist you have to clearly understand your message. The Communication learning outcomes that Scott identifies will scaffold the knowledge necessary to achieve that goal (8).

- Articulates thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written, and nonverbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts
- Uses communication for a range of purposes (e.g. to inform, instruct, motivate)
- Communicates effectively in diverse environments (8).

Finally, the fourth C is Collaboration. Social Justice work cannot be done in isolation. Dr. King did not and could not work in isolation. Ghandi did not work in isolation. There are many more names to support the theory that it takes allies and accomplices to help achieve a just society. "Historically, changes have occurred when people of all races, social classes, genders,

and religions collectively fought oppression and discrimination (e.g., abolition of slavery, civil rights legislation). Therefore, a central focus should be placed on unifying forces of good around the globe" (Boutte 171). Collaboration is not just a 21st Century Skill, it is essential to effective social justice work. Thankfully it is also present in most theatre education work as well. Here are some examples:

- Demonstrates the ability to work effectively with diverse teams
- Exercises flexibility and willingness to be helpful in making necessary compromises to accomplish a common goal.
- Assumes shared responsibility for collaborative work. (8).

Social justice education is not separate from the academic rigor or standards. They simply work together, enhancing one another as they increase awareness and appreciation for our democratic society. Second and third graders can demonstrate Learning and Innovation by brainstorming activists, selecting one, and then pantomiming how that activist contributed to society. As a formative assessment, fourth and fifth graders can work in small groups to generate a list of activists and sort the names into categories by types of activists. These students would be demonstrating Collaboration as well as Critical Thinking and Problem Solving.

"Teachers who are skilled in equity pedagogy are able to use diversity to enrich instruction instead of fearing or ignoring it. They are able to use diversity successfully because they understand its meaning in both their own and their student's lives" (McGhee Banks and Banks 152). The skill set comes from experience, research and training. Not every school can afford to send their teachers to workshops and conferences. But every teacher can afford to read one article a semester or school year to enhance their skills and diversify their curriculum.

Why does Social Justice Belong in Early Childhood Education?

Teaching is a unique profession that affords us the opportunity to touch and change lives in a way that no other profession can. Teachers not only teach their content area(s), but ideally they also teach the qualities of democratic citizenship. In a solo article, Hytten identifies those qualities as "… openness, tolerance, respect, humility, cooperation, accountability, moral commitment, critical thinking, and concern for the common good, including the dignity and rights of minorities" (Philosophy and Art of Teaching for Social Justice 441). We start teaching these characteristics on the first day of school and continue teaching them through primary school, secondary school, and even tertiary education. This is all part of social justice work. It is all part of a just society.

I haven't found any sources that say the work is easy and without resistance, but in the *"Rights are the Words for Being Fair": Multicultural Practice in the Early Childhood Classroom,* Dana Frantz Bentley notes that "…it is far easier to say we believe in multiculturalism, diversity, and social justice than it is to actually find and implement the meaning in the lives of our young students (195). First, educators and administrators must believe that children are not *future* citizens. According to Louise Phillips, children are "citizens of today" (Social Justice Storytelling and Young Children's Citizenship 365). They must be afforded the opportunity to use their citizenship to make a difference while they are young, so they are ready to make change when the rest of the world finally considers them citizens. When educators treat our students like citizens, not future citizens, then they will rise to the occasion and act like citizens.

In *Exploring Names and Identity through Multicultural Literature in K-8 classrooms*, Barbara Peterson and others assert that our global society is dependent on all students developing

cultural competencies. "Teachers are in the position to positively or negatively impact their students' perceptions and developing identities" (Peterson, Alley and Gunn 40). We can assume that well-intentioned teachers do not aim to willfully cause harm to students by negatively impacting their developing identities. However, it happens every day with acts as simple as frequently mispronouncing someone's name because it's difficult or only selecting plays and stories that depict a European culture. These simple repetitive acts cause undo harm to students who begin to feel invisible and inhibited in their classrooms and in the world.

Opponents of social justice in early education may argue that pre-kindergarten is too young to start discussing identity and diversity. Nora Hyland contends that children are constantly absorbing messages about power and privilege from a very young age. "While families are a critical piece in shaping children's values on such matters, classroom practices communicate and reinforce strong, subtle, and repeated social messages about what is and is not valued" (Hyland 82). Classrooms and schools should be sending implicit and overt messages that if those who have power and privilege, must use it to equalize those who are marginalized. For those who are marginalized, we reinforce the idea that they are seen and valued.

"Educators face the challenge of preparing students from diverse populations and backgrounds to live in a rapidly changing world in which some groups have greater societal benefits than others because of race, ethnicity, gender, class, language, religion, ability, or age" (Boutte 166). Boutte impresses upon us that educators can envision pedagogies that can positively change the world (165). Changing the world in which our students grow up requires moving out of our comfort zone and actually living in the discomfort on challenging issues. "We have the right to remain silent, but silence on issues of oppression and discrimination connotes agreement" (Boutte 166). Our silence also informs our students that certain topics are off limits

not only to talk about, but to affect change. "What parents and educators do not say or do is as powerful as what we do" (Boutte 167).

Illusions Impact Reality

According to Boutte, society holds at least two illusions about youth that prevent educators from incorporating social justice work in early childhood education – 1) Young children are colorblind and do not think about issues of race and racism (166) and 2) Multiculturalism and diversity are valued in today's society (168). Both concepts are falsehoods. This January, as we were teaching kindergarteners and first graders about Dr. King, the African American children immediately identified with Dr. King stating "He looks like me!" Many white children were concerned that it wasn't fair to be mean to someone because they look different from you. The illusion that young children are colorblind holds true in part because if you consider that young students do not necessarily have the vocabulary to describe what they observe about race, but they are in fact observing it. If illusion two were correct, that multiculturalism and diversity are valued in today's society, then our first graders would already know about Dr. King and what he stood for. In fact, throughout Black History Month the students were unaware of any of the diversity leaders we presented to them. Schools and teachers represent value by spending time on certain subjects. The lack of time spent talking about multiculturalism and diversity represents the lack of value placed on those topics.

"Young children are continuously internalizing messages about people who are different than they are—even when parents value diversity. It is thus important that children receive ongoing messages from several sources that convey a commitment to social justice and equity" (Hyland 166). Schools have to be one of those sources. Educators spend so many hours with children every week that we have to assume some responsibility for nurturing notions of equity

and justice. "K-6 students cannot develop critical knowledge and skills needed for living in an interconnected world without social justice education" (Hubbard and Hilbodt Swain 219). The concepts of equality and democracy come full circle. Citizens participate in their society, whether they do so in a participatory role, socially-responsible role, or justice-oriented role, they need to be aware of the issues to be leaders and create social change. Children are not ostriches with their heads in the sand -unaware of the world around them and the injustices that unfold daily.

> Students see real, perceived, or potential social justice issues and debates relived around the world in the media every day (e.g., Ferguson, Missouri racial unrest; Pakistani activist, Malala Yousafzai's human rights advocacy for education; same-sex marriage legislation; immigration; Syrian civil war resulting in millions of refugees needing humanitarian assistance.) (Hubbard and Hilboldt Swain 219).

They see the issues even if we ignore them on their behalf. If we don't talk about them, they are unable to understand the broader issues and participate in their democracy. If schools continue to wait until high school or college, or sometimes never, to address complex issues then oppression lives on and it's our fault. "Racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination and oppression do not have to be cultural legacies" (Boutte 171). We have the ability to pass on something better for our students.

Hubbard and Hilboldt Swain assert that elementary schools are the "precise venues in which students should explore foundational social justice concepts and ideals with support from adults." (230) However, their study of K-6 pre-service teachers showed that this was not happening largely due to fear and an unwillingness to address sensitive issues (230). Hytten and Bettez also co-wrote *Community Building in Social Justice Work: A Critical approach.* Here

they identified several habits and abilities they believe educators need to have to effectively work for social justice:

(a) engage in ongoing critical self-reflection;

(b) explicitly name how power, privilege, and oppression operate;

c) employ critical thinking and analysis skills in linking social justice theory and practice;

(d) develop a sense of agency and empowerment in working toward social change; and

(e) engage in regular dialogue with others (49).

Much of the work that has to be done starts with us as educators. We have to undo our own beliefs that children are future citizens and that they are not ready to grapple tough subjects. Our current reality is revealing to us that as long as children are around people who are older than they are, be they teenagers or adults, they are being exposed to hard topics. Children are always listening and absorbing. It's time we gave them the chance to analyze and explore their own experiences.

Chapter 3 – The Role of Social Justice in the Arts

Theatre is a perfect venue for incorporating social justice. It creates opportunities to connect storytelling, literacy, playwriting, and productions to capture complicated themes and to reflect student lives. Because theatre is a visceral experience that engages so many of the senses, it implants lasting memories in children's minds. In her article, *Applied Theatre And/As Activism*, Monica Prendergrast shared one such lasting experience. "I remember in grade two seeing a TYA play in our school about the safety of the wetlands ... I remember the songs ... one moment and I was hooked" (21). Every child in that audience did not grow up to be an environmental activist, but the experience shaped their understanding of the world and how the role they play in it.

Bentley noted that we should frame our multicultural curriculum in such a way that it encourages children to create their own meaning and theories (197). In this way, the work becomes personal and they become more committed and personally involved. Teachers can begin this process with a formative assessment. The formative assessment, which can take various forms depending on the age of the students, should help the teacher gauge student understanding of the subject matter, any previous misconceptions, and any fear or hesitation that might exist on that topic. The constructivist pedagogy is appropriate with this subject matter as the teacher uses the information gleaned from the formative assessment to design the next steps in the lesson.

If the teacher observes fear, how can the next steps help to assuage those fears? If there is more pre-existing knowledge in the room than anticipated, how can we build on that knowledge instead of reteaching it? If there are misconceptions about the topic, how do we create a safe place where opinions are respected and students are encouraged to reframe their current

thinking? The answers are all different per age group, per classroom, per topic, etc. Addressing these answers requires that the teacher develop a relationship and understanding of the individual students in their classroom as needs differ from student to student.

When designing the curriculum, it's important to consider that "not all children engage with, acquire, and represent learning in the same ways" (Bentley 198). Some students thrive in whole group conversations. Their confidence shines through as they unabashedly share their opinions. Some students are too shy or too afraid to be wrong to share in front of a whole group. Rather than mark these students down for lack of participation, teachers can offer small group opportunities for sharing. A protocol in which one student shares while a partner student listens might encourage those quieter students. Additionally, some students can draw or write their thoughts but they will not share outloud even in a small group. Creative opportunities for these thinkers to share their thoughts will also be important.

This can occur in theatre education as well. The culmination of a lesson plan involving designing costumes for migrant workers might offer the following options for output: drawing the costume on a schematic or blank sheet of paper, writing a detailed description of what the character is wearing, giving a brief oral presentation on your desired costume, or pulling costume pieces from stock to create your costume design. The academic topic is costume design. The social justice infusion involves migrant workers. The teacher has created an equitable output for various learners.

In *Social Justice Storytelling and Young Children's Citizenship,* Phillips discusses how storytelling has the ability to "nurture identity" thereby encouraging individuality and welcoming diversity (364). I believe this diversity is both diversity of culture and diversity of thought. When theatre educators do not view play selection as an opportunity to reflect both diversity of culture

and diversity of thought, then it is a missed opportunity. Our selection of plays and discussion topics send a direct message to children about who and what we believe are important. Sandy Farquhar echoes that sentiment in her article *Narrative Identity and Early Childhood Education.* Farquhar argues that understanding curriculum as "a reflection of historical and cultural perspectives" is an essential consideration both in the definition of, as well as the practical application of, the word curriculum (299).

As we are exploring plays, we must commit to taking the extra time to expand our personal canon of dramatic literature to include diverse dramatic literature to deconstruct with our students. Author Joan Lazarus believes we must take it at least a step farther. "We must deliberately help students find connections between what happens onstage and what happens in the world. This transfer of insights from a class or production to a student's life and vice versa is a goal of both drama and formal theatre..." (Lazarus 156). Similarly, she explains that socially-responsible theatre education includes producing plays with complex, controversial themes relevant to students' lives. Assuming that age-appropriate is implied, this should be every theatre educators goal. Complex and sometimes controversial themes do not necessarily mean that the play is not entertaining. Lazarus is not saying that musicals and comedies cannot achieve this goal. The 2016 movie *Zootopia* tackled the challenging themes of diversity and inclusion while *Moana*, also a 2016 debut, broached identity and female empowerment. In their own creative way, both children's films contained social justice themes while still being appropriate for wide range of audiences.

Children's theatre or Theatre for Young Audiences can broach social justice themes in the same way. Both the Broadway show *The Lion King* and *Disney's The Lion King Experience* tackle issues of injustice and unfairness within a community. Simba, who is "the lion king", must

stand and take action to regain order in his community. This is an acclaimed and beloved musical of adults and children alike. There are many plays based on the Lewis Carroll's classic books *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-glass and What Alice Found There.* Because of the nature of the original text, the plays naturally explore identity – both claiming and maintaining your own identity in a world or community that seeks to change you. Children's theatre can and should address the issues of diversity and inclusion as well.

Plays like Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty's *Once on this Island* include diversity by virtue of the non-Eurocentric setting and the culture embedded in the plot. Depending on the age group viewing or performing *Once on this Island* or *Once on this Island Jr.,* teachers could guide their class in a discussion on the impacts of classism, maintaining cultural integrity, and acceptance. In *Once on this Island*, the script does not "fix" the issues of classism that are inherent in the culture, but it does show how the people live and find happiness despite their challenges. It is important that people that are marginalized are not consistently pitied for their unfair situations. Even within the conflict, this play shows moments of joy and celebration despite the constant marginalization.

Not everyone agrees that social justice naturally pairs with arts education. In *Perspectives on Social Justice in Music Teacher Education,* Karen Salvador and Jacqueline Kelly-McHale revealed the results of a survey of music teachers on the topic of social justice in their classrooms. Ten percent of the 113 music educators surveyed "cited lack of interest or felt it was not their job" to incorporate social justice content in their classroom (Salvador and Kelly-McHale 24). Twelve of the respondents were purposely not covering social justice in their classrooms because they felt it was not their job because "This would take away from the time for teaching music content. I leave that to the Political Science courses or History, etc.'" Another

respondent noted that instead of teaching about social justice, teachers could save time by saying "We are all equal, and should be treated as such. We should celebrate our differences as much as we celebrate our similarities. In the end, we are all human beings." That statement would then free up teachers to talk about "more important topics." Funding and lack of knowledge were also cited as barriers (Salvador and Kelly-McHale 24).

Unfortunately, even history teachers can be found avoiding social justice issues simply because it's easier to avoid it than to address the issues head on (Hubbard and Hilboldt Swain 228). We cannot continue to pass the buck and wait for the next subject to address important topics. If for no other reason than it isn't fair to our students.

According to Hubbard and Hilboldt Swain, fear and uncertainty are additional reasons that teachers avoid or even water down social justice issues including historical movements like the civil rights movement (Hubbard and Hilboldt Swain 229). This is where a formative assessment can be helpful. Teachers can determine where the students are on the topic and might even uncover leaders in the subject matter in their own classroom. We have to stop assuming our children are too young and acknowledge that our students are listening when their parents are watching and discussing the news or NPR. "First, we must recognize that these issues are already affecting our lives and children's lives," (Au, Bigelow and Karp 170). Shortly before the 2016 elections, four-year-olds in my building could be heard saying "I would have voted for the man with the kind eyes." The day after the elections, three-year-old children could be heard saying to each other "Did you hear the bad man won?" For better or worse, our children are listening and reacting to issues now. They are not waiting until we think they are ready.

Regardless of the demographics of a particular school or classroom, Boutte believes that inclusive instruction and content can transform classrooms into the kind of society we want to

live in. "While the vision of a less hateful world seems unattainable to some, we can start by respecting the infinite ways to be human and recognizing that all of them should be valued" (Boutte 171). Although it may seem oversimplified, Boutte is actually suggesting that teachers have more power than they realize. We have the power to expose children to an equitable world so they can desire it, create it, and maintain that equity for others.

According to Hubbard and Hilboldt Swain, soon teachers won't have a choice but to respond to events and respond to world events in the classroom. "We believe our quickly expanding diverse student and parent populations, with increasing access to media and first-hand knowledge of inequities within their own communities and the world will soon become intolerant of teacher silence" (230). If educators were made aware of the importance of social justice as well as simple ways to incorporate it in their curriculum, they might not be so hesitant and resistant to making changes in their curriculum that ultimately benefit their students and reflect their present situations. Unfortunately, Stanton and Gonzalez observed that students are not seeing the connections between their curriculum and present day events (Stanton and Gonzalez 47). The disservice to students continues as we deprive our future leaders of opportunities to develop critical thinking skills. Boutte asserts that "Professing love for children and humanity without reflective and collaborative action is inadequate" (Boutte 165-166). Whether in small steps or large leaps, social justice education is the collaborative action the world requires we take.

Chapter 4 - Infusing Social Justice into Theatre Arts Curricula

When teaching social justice, it's important to remember that social justice is being infused into the theatre curricula as opposed to infusing theatre into social justice curricula. It can be easy and frustrating to confuse the two concepts. This chapter addresses the issue of lack of theatre arts social justice curricula in pre-K through fifth grade. These grade levels are often overlooked when it comes to social justice education. To address that issue, I have created curricula proposals for each grade configuration. Each proposal contains a formative assessment to gauge whether the proposed curriculum needs modifications based on the specific class. Every Theatre Arts program looks different in terms of frequency of class meetings and duration of each class. The proposals are designed to be specific enough to follow and broad enough to tweak and apply to almost any structure. I have tried many of these learning experiences in my own classroom and will discuss suggestions and reactions in the next chapter.

Bentley challenges us with powerful questions such as "What does it mean to practice multiculturalism in the early childhood classroom? What does social justice look like in the everyday lives of four-and five-year-olds?" and "…how do we translate these huge ideas into meaningful practices for young children?" (Bentley 195). Certainly, this paper cannot fully answer those questions. But this chapter can explore possible practical applications of social justice in early childhood education.

Teaching Tolerance, an organization dedicated to "reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation's children," introduced the Social Justice Standards to assist with curriculum develop in regards to social justice, anti-bias, prejudice reduction, advocating collective action (Lindberg, Chiariello and Olsen Edwards ii, 2). The standards are divided into four domains – identity, diversity, justice,

and action (IDJA). The grade-level outcomes for each domain directly relate to the standards. In this chapter, I will specify how the curriculum directly connects to a standard or outcome as identified by Teaching Tolerance. I intend to prove that social justice can successfully be incorporated into a theatre arts curriculum.

Preschool/Pre-kindergarten

Unit Overview

This unit introduces preschool and pre-kindergarteners to Martin Luther King Jr. through the book *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Rappaport). Students will learn the importance of Dr. King's words while using their voice, body, and imagination. Social Justice Standards do not exist for pre-kindergarten, which is not to say that it is impossible or inappropriate to start social justice work in this grade level. It simply begins at a level that is accessible and meaningful for that age group. That being said, this age-appropriate preschool/pre-kindergarten curriculum proposal still reaches some of the K-2 outcomes in the diversity and justice domains. Additionally, many preschool and pre-kindergarten programs do not have a theatre teacher or creative dramatics teacher. This proposal was created with that in mind and is still accessible for the classroom teacher.

Formative Assessment

This unit, inspired by Bentley's experience with this book, can begin with a class discussion about the meaning of the word "fair". Fair is a synonym for justice, but justice is not likely to resonate with this age group. Document children's answers for the word "fair" for later use in the unit. Young children who do not wish to participate in a full group discussion or need time to process their answer, may be amenable to one-on-one conversations later in the day. Bentley clarifies that we aren't really looking for a definition, rather we are seeking "the lively

collective development of theories which live in the past and future experiences of these young children" (197). We're encouraging them to give voice to how they see the world which should result in a deeper connection with the topic and unit. Bentley's intention when starting this unit was to create a presentation to be included in a Martin Luther King Day celebration, but this unit does not have to be taught around Martin Luther King Day or Black History month. It can be done at any time of year.

Learning Experiences

Before beginning the book *Martin's Big Words*, ask the children what they know about Dr. King. Some students may know a few correct facts, while others may have incorrect information. Accept all answers and then read the book to answer the questions. At this point, the teacher will have to read the room and know their students to gauge their reactions and immediate needs. Student reaction could range from a sea of questions or silence while they process. In that processing time, students are actually accessing the K-2 outcome for Justice Standard 15- "I know about people who helped stop unfairness and worked to make life better for many people" (Lindberg, Chiariello and Olsen Edwards 5). It makes sense that children in preschool and pre-k would need time to process that Dr. King, who helped to stop unfairness, was unfairly killed by someone who didn't agree with him. After some processing time, a physical activity may be in order.

This next activity explores fairness and taking action. Using some of the situations from the formative assessment, have students improvise an unfair situation and then have another student intervene and improvise a fair action to equalize the situation. Due to their age, the improvised scenes would have to be kept short and fast-paced but this age group loves to play pretend and has the ability to stay engaged with short scenes that are meaningful to them. This

fairness activity hits Justice 12 Outcome, another K-2 standard, "I know when people are treated unfairly" (Lindberg, Chiariello and Olsen Edwards 5). In the formative assessment, students already proved they could identify unfairness, but with this activity they use hypothetical situations to achieve K-2 outcomes in the Action domain. Action outcomes 16-17 and 20 relate to caring for those who are treated unfairly, doing something when you see unfairness, making the classroom fair for everyone (Lindberg, Chiariello and Olsen Edwards 5).

During the next class meeting, as applicable for the frequency of your classroom, re-read the book and engage in discussion. When Bentley utilized this approach, students were ready for discussion after the second reading. They wanted to know what rights were, and who was white, and what did it mean to be shot? "I did not have the answers," Bentley said. "I did not have to. The kids had them" (199). Even in the midst of questions and answers, be sure to ask them about the connection between fair and Dr. King. This will lead to a discussion where children are able to make meaning out of the topic as they share their own interpretations on the topic.

The next learning experience involves their physical interpretation of the "big words" in the book." The teacher will read a big word featured in the book and students will pose and freeze. The featured words in the big book are concepts that Dr. King deemed important. The words are printed in oversized text reflecting the title *Martin's Big Words.* For instance, the teacher could say "Peace" and students would pose in a way that illustrates what it means to be peaceful or what peace means to them. The teacher takes a photograph of each class pose. Repeat the process for each big word featured in the book.

In the next class meeting, display the photographs around the room for students to see. Students should walk around the room as quietly as possible looking at each photo. When they are done, the teacher, will call out one of Martin's Big Words and students will go to whatever

photograph they think represents that word. Ask students what they see in the image that connects to the big word you read. Repeat the activity for as many words as desired.

Final Performance Task

During the next class meeting, show a variety of images of Dr. King at various ages. Each student will get a chance to be Dr. King's Thought Bubble. They will stand up and face their audience (the class) and use their voice and imagination to say what Dr. King might be thinking. Close this unit by sharing facts about Dr. King that are relevant to the photos that were displayed.

Using *Martin's Big Words* provided an entry point for Bentley's students to present their findings and interpretations to the entire school. If that is needed or desired, the photographs that were taken earlier in the unit, could be displayed on a screen at an assembly with the relevant big word added to the image. Although it is not a performance, it does reflect younger grades using their body and imagination in relation to a civil rights leader. All in all, that is a unique reflection and a grand finale to a unit that hits K-2 Social Justice Outcomes as young as preschool. To extend the unit, consider *What does Peace Feel Like* (Radunsky) as a follow up to *Martin's Big Words.*

Kindergarten/First Grade

Unit Overview

This unit should be a multicultural experience as multiculturalism is a vital part of social justice education. The unit will introduce them to stories and plays from around the world in an effort to increase their awareness of culture and how it shapes our world. Students will also practice audience etiquette during storytelling and practice their performing skills. This unit can be as long or as short as time permits. It is very flexible and can easily be extended into a year's

curriculum. A play can be created from just one of the stories or a composite of a selection of the stories explored in that unit or school year. Not surprisingly, this multicultural unit is aligned the Diversity Standards as well as a few Identity and Justice Standards.

Formative Assessment

For this particular unit, there is no formative assessment. Teachers should feel free to add one as desired or needed for grading purposes. The following is more of a hook or introduction to the unit than an actual formative assessment. Ask students to share what countries they are from or what countries are in their ancestry. Using a world map, put a pin in each state or country. This provides a visual reminder of the cultural diversity in the room or in the grade level if there are multiple kindergarten or first grade classes. Even in an all-white classroom, there will likely be some international influence. Displaying a world map in the classroom, also illustrates the point that theatre happens all over the world and takes on different forms depending on where it is presented. The conversation can continue by asking students what they know about these different countries and highlighting any commonalities that arise. Students should be encouraged to avoid categorizing different events and traditions as "weird". After all, they are not weird to the people who celebrate them.

The K-2 Identity Standards can be difficult to achieve because they rely on teachers planting seeds of diversity and engaging in identity work with students on a consistent basis. The Identity Outcomes are very personal and can be encouraged, but not explicitly taught. To achieve these outcomes, students must demonstrate that they know and like who they are, have pride in their group identities, know that they are individual, feel good about themselves without being mean, and noticing and expressing interest in different family traditions (Lindberg, Chiariello

and Olsen Edwards 5). It makes sense that these challenging standards take three years to achieve. Clearly starting young is key to developing a strong sense of self-worth and community.

Learning Experiences

The stories will best serve their purposes if they are connected to a child's own experiences. Using versions of fairytales from around the world will help facilitate conversations about why certain stories are different. Stories like "Cinderella" exist in various cultures and can easily be converted into a long unit exploring different versions of that story. Creation stories, mythology and trickster tales also spark thought-provoking conversation and shift the conversation from comparisons and into the world of observation. If the formative assessment/hook is completed, use that information to shape which books are selected. It is important for students to see their own culture reflected in what is traditionally a white, nationalistic curriculum. It is also important for students to see cultures other than their own to round out their academic experience.

Suggested books include, but are not limited to, *The Irish Cinderlad* (Climo), *Why the Sky is Far Away: A Nigerian Folktale* (Gerson and Golembe), *The Dancing Pig* (Sierra and Sweetwater), *Goldy Luck and the 3 Pandas* (Yin and Zong), and *Love and Roast Chicken: A Trickster Tale from the Andes* (Knutson). Exploring stories from different cultures is an opportunity to explore music from different cultures as well. Music from the relevant culture or tradition could be playing as students enter the room. Traditional theatre games can still be played as classes explore character and culture. For instance, Fantastic Faces is traditionally played by asking children to make the faces of specific emotions like happy or sad. Young actors could explore characters by making a face of how the sisters in *The Dancing Pig* felt when they saw the Ransassa at their door. Imagination can be activated by re-reading a story and

simultaneously allowing the class to collectively re-enact the story without assigning characters. Allow students to be any character they want and interpret the action in any way they see fit.

Other cultural choices include exploring games from the specific cultures. While exploring *Why the Sky is Far Away,* students could play If I Call Your Name, a traditional Nigerian dancing game (Songs and Rhymes from Nigeria). If the reading of *Goldy Luck and the 3 Pandas* is timed around Chinese New Year, then the classes could learn about Chinese New Year, collaborate on a Chinese Dragon and have a parade to celebrate Chinese New Year.

As educators, we have to find the balance between teaching about other cultures and "othering" them. Hyland explains that "… presenting an occasional book about a racial or ethnic group when the majority of the books and images are based on Whites or White norms reinforces the idea that groups other than Whites are the exception, not the norm, and communicates to children that some groups are seen as more valuable than others" (Hyland 84-85). Our purpose is to include the other cultures, not exoticize them in such a way that makes them seem abnormal. Our awareness and sensitivity to avoid "othering" helps to break the established White normality that is inherent in most curriculum.

By including, rather than exoticizing, we can help students achieve Diversity Standards 8 and 10 – "I want to know about other people and how our lives and experiences are the same and different." As well as "I find it interesting that groups of people believe different things and live their daily lives in different ways" (Lindberg, Chiariello and Olsen Edwards 5). Encouraging respectful inquiry also helps to achieve these standards. When children know that they have permission to ask the question, they are more likely to ask several questions to satisfy their curiosity.

Final Performance Task

Many early childhood educators write scripts for their classes to perform in an effort to include as many children as possible into a production. This final performance task would require that same effort. Adapting the stories used in classes brings the stories from a theoretical state to a more concrete one, allowing students to actually live the lives of people from other cultures. Obviously, the more authentic the approach the better. If a production cannot be done well and with high respect to the culture being appreciated, then it should not be done, or the production should be simplified to eliminate challenging or costly design elements. There is so much that can be conveyed through rhythm, accessories, music, and sound effects, that complicated production elements can be deemed unnecessary. Sometimes that simplicity helps the children to remember that these are real people, or fictional stories that real people are still telling through oral and written tradition. Those connections helps students recognize that their friends "have many identities but they are always just themselves" (Lindberg, Chiariello and Olsen Edwards 5). That is Justice Standard 11 which is more achievable when we make meaningful connections to our students' lives.

Second/Third Grade

Unit Overview

This unit reminds students that they are "agents of change" in their community by focusing on performance skills and student agency. There is no performance written into this unit, but the learning experiences can certainly precede a performance unit or rehearsal process. This action-oriented unit primarily focuses on the Action Standards for grade 3-5.

Formative Assessment

On the first day of the unit, play the song "Agents of Change" by Teresa Jennings and encourage students to listen to the lyrics. Before discussing what students think they could

change in the world, provide the students with some think time to encourage thoughtful answers. As students are sharing their answers, document these topics for use in theatre games later in the unit. Answers can be shared aloud or each student can write on sticky note and put it on an idea wall. To honor everyone's ideas, a word cloud could be made to reflect all the ideas shared in the room since it is likely that not everyone's ideas will be included in the unit. Sharing is important, but how that is accomplished is not important in this lesson. This discussion can be as long or short as time allows. The main purpose is to activate their thinking and interest in this unit. Students should feel encouraged to make small and large changes, understanding that both types of changes are valuable in our world and all change brings us closer to Action Outcomes 19 and 20 which involve taking a stand against injustice and carrying out action against injustice (Lindberg, Chiariello and Olsen Edwards 5). As we get deeper into this short unit, students will have more opportunities to practice standing against injustice and carrying out action.

Learning Experiences

Whenever possible, have a version of the song "Agents of Change" playing as students enter the classroom. Prior to the next phase, the teacher will have selected one of the topics that came up during the formative assessment, for example, the environment. Students will design a superhero whose mission is to do something specific to help the environment. This is another opportunity to meet Action Outcomes 19 and 20. The design includes the superhero's name and their super power. The superhero's secret identity is the actual student. Using a superhero template, students will draw the superhero and record the superhero's name, superpower, and secret identity. These superheroes should be displayed in some way to honor their work.

Students will present their superhero's after they are complete. Take some time to review projection, articulation, and expression. Student presentations should include a superhero pose as

well as the superhero name and their superpower. Students can pair up and rehearse their superhero presentations with each other before presenting to the entire class. The superhero pose is an opportunity for students to practice physical expression, while the presentation itself is an opportunity to practice vocal dynamics.

With a little thought, many theatre games can be adapted for this unit. For example, the game Right You Are Bob involves students lining up and trying to sell a product in an overly enthusiastic and often silly way. For instance, the first student says "Call in soon to get these beautiful leis from Hawaii," and the second student says "Right you are Bob, and if you call in now you'll get an extra lei to decorate that lei!" Each student adds on to the last statement, starting with "Right you are Bob." When adapted this game could look like this: "Oh no, there's so much smog, I can't see where I'm going. Good thing I have my Smog Goggles," and the second student might say "Right you are Bob, Smog Goggles are helpful in the smog and the ocean." Each student continues to add on to the previous statement, starting with "Right You are Bob." While this game is intentionally silly, it is not intended to make light of the work needed in our world. It is a fun way to engage students in problem-solving and cooperation, which are important skills in life, theatre, and in social justice work.

Final Performance Task

The final task of this unit should be self-affirming. Providing the students with think time, allow students to consider how they would like to be an agent of change in the world. Encourage them to choose something that they will actually commit to doing (i.e. picking up litter, reminding their families not to idle, bringing their water bottle to school). As their exit ticket, have them use projection, articulation, and expression to say "I am an Agent of Change and I will change the world by…". This simple task reminds them that small actions are valuable

too, while emphasizing the frequent need for vocal and physical expression while communicating with others.

Fourth/Fifth Grade

Unit Overview

This unit incorporates writing, research, and performance as students explore Spoken Word. By fourth and fifth grade, students have been exposed to poetry in an academic setting, but they have likely not been exposed to spoken word. This unit helps them make the connections with the written form of poetry and the oral tradition of spoken word. By the end of the unit, students will take a stand on world or community issues by writing and performing original spoken word pieces on those topics. The process and final performance are aligned with many of the Justice and Action Outcomes for grades 3-5.

Formative Assessment

Introduce students to spoken word via actual spoken word performances. Videos of spoken word performances can be assigned for homework or watched in class. Topics of the selected spoken word videos should range from light and accessible topics to heavier and more serious topics. The videos should reflect a variety of ages and races. The diversity in the videos reflects inclusion, which is part of the role of the teacher as they infuse social justice into their curricula.

To assess what students know about spoken word, create a Venn diagram to compare spoken word and poetry. This can be done as a whole group or in small groups with each group creating their own Venn diagram. This information can be used to determine what vocabulary needs to be retaught (rhyme, free verse, alliteration, etc.).

To assess student knowledge on social justice and activism, introduce them to activists of various ages, cultures, and issues. Again, it's important that they can see themselves in these issues, so some of the activists should be the age of the students or should have started their activism at the current age of the students. After their thinking is activated, students can do a Round Robin activity in which they circle up and share ideas of community and world issues that require activism. Students can pass but the activity continues around the circle repeatedly until people are having trouble coming up with new ideas. The types of topics that arise in this activity likely reflect the types of issues that will resurface in their writing. Even in the formative assessment, students have the opportunity to demonstrate Justice Outcomes 12-15 which involve knowing when people are treated unfairly; knowing that people treat others unfairly using words, behaviors, rules, and laws; having an awareness that some people have a harder life because of who they are and where they were born; and knowing the actions of people and groups that work for justice and fairness (Lindberg, Chiariello and Olsen Edwards 7). As the curricula unfolds, students will have more opportunities to demonstrate these outcomes as they shift to the Action Outcomes.

Learning Experiences

Because this unit is introducing a new art form, spoken word, as well as a lens that may be new to them, it's important to keep both the art form and the new lens at the forefront of the conversation. In this unit, one is not more important than the other, they serve each other for a common purpose. To that end, teachers should not dedicate a class period to talking about social justice. Teachers should be consistently reminding students and providing examples of how social justice and poetry have a rich, intertwined history (Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Chicano Messengers, etc). At this point, rewatch one of the videos used in the formative

assessment. Suggested spoken word pieces include "If You Give a Child a Word" (TedXTalks), "Origin Story" (Kay), "Happiness" (Garzota and Solomon), and "Clint Smith 'Aristotle'" (TeachForAll).

To keep social justice at the forefront, re-watch a spoken word piece that took a stand on a world or community issue. This time, ask students what poetic elements they noticed (rhyme, free verse, alliteration, etc.); how would they explain spoken word to someone who wasn't familiar with this art form?; what vocal dynamics did they notice (projection, articulation, expression, etc.)? This can be done individually, in small groups, as a whole group, for homework, etc. Students should receive feedback on their answers either from other students or from the teacher in written or oral form. In our class we use the acrostic PAPER to emphasize the vocal dynamics – Projection, Articulation, Pacing, Expression, Rehearse all of these. Whether we are rehearsing a play or spoken word, we always incorporate PAPER so our young actors understand how vital it is to incorporate these dynamics in each rehearsal.

Before writing their own spoken word piece, students should brainstorm a list of topics of things they don't like. These topics can be very light and even funny, but they must be true and connect to the student in some way. After brainstorming, students will pick a topic from their list to write a short, spoken word piece that includes at least one poetic device (excluding rhyme and free verse). After writing their piece, students will perform their piece for the class. This mid-point assessment provides the teacher with an opportunity to assess both the incorporation of poetic devices as well as the application of vocal dynamics.

Before brainstorming for their actual spoken word piece, it may be necessary to rewatch a different video that highlights vocal dynamics in a very clear way. Point out the vocal dynamics in the piece, highlighting the use of rhythm which makes it different from a traditional

monologue. Even after the frontloading and exposure to spoken word videos, some students may still have trouble creating a brainstorm list. These students may benefit from a list of words that reflect concepts as opposed to content (greed, peace, justice, injustice, elders, youth, power, possessions, lacking, hope, fail, etc.). Finally, students will write their own spoken word pieces or group pieces on the topics they chose.

Additional learning experiences can and should be added if the formative assessment shows that students are not ready for these steps. It's important that students feel comfortable with writing spoken word, so they put more attention into writing on the topic than the form of the piece itself. Alternatively, teachers should also take liberties with the curriculum if the formative assessment reveals that students are able to move faster than planned.

Final Performance Task

The unit can end with a public showcase or a simple class performance of their spoken word pieces. The performance aspect, whether a small or large audience, helps to solidify that this unique unit still honors a theatre curriculum. The performance aligns itself with Action Outcomes 19-20 for grades 3-5. By performing their pieces and group pieces, students are speaking up against unfairness that they have identified and working to make their school and community affair place for everyone (Lindberg, Chiariello and Olsen Edwards 7). This unit is just one of many in a school year. Even though it only hits a few outcomes for the grade level, the cumulative curriculum over the course of the year or throughout grades 3-5 can successfully hit all of the outcomes.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion and Recommendations

As you begin a cultural or social justice journey with your students and consequently, your school, it is important to assess where they are in their personal and collective journeys. Are they progressive in their education, but not necessarily accepting of new philosophies? Do they believe in love and harmony among all human beings without a desire to take action to achieve that love and harmony? In short, are they ready to be visible and active on the front lines of social justice? Even if the answers to all of the questions are no, that doesn't mean that a teacher has to quit their job and find a new school. It simply means that just like a student, you have to meet that school where they are. Determine where the gaps are and begin to fill them accordingly.

In retrospect, I skipped that step. I dove in into the process head first and paid the price. In preschool and pre-k, students and families were excited about exploring "Tales from Around the World". They thought it was exciting to learn about the stories they'd grown up with from a different perspective and cultural twist. I did hesitate however, before selecting *A is for Activist* (Nagara). I opted to read *Counting on Community* (Nagara) instead because the title appeared less overbearing and more palatable. That choice was a success and I didn't field any complaints from parents. A month later, I found a copy of *A is for Activist* in one of the preschool libraries. It just goes to show that making the "right" choice is difficult and varies for the individual.

Hubbard and Hilboldt Swain stress that "Reading and re-reading the book is important when working with young children because we are allowing them to listen, consider and to respond in their own time" (199). This approach worked with *Counting on Community* (Nagara). Although some students said "We read this already," other students sat with rapt attention and shared observations they hadn't noticed before. Some students shared connections with their own

lives that they didn't make on the first read. It also seems that the parents saw, as we did, that theatre education encourages participants to develop "a positive, empowered sense of self within a respectful community" (Lazarus 126). Over the course of a year, our books covered various cultures. Students were able to see themselves in the books and also use theatre games to present sides of themselves that they don't see on paper. In all my years of teaching, I had never witnessed more children personally and positively identify with the curriculum as I did when we explored "Tales from Around the World."

I also lucked out with my experience with kindergarten and first grade parents. They too thought it was exciting and interesting to explore different countries and cultures. They enjoyed guessing which flags were associated with which countries. The multicultural and diversity approach was the right fit for these parents and this age group. Multicultural literature can be defined as "… books that reflect the racial, ethnic, and social diversity of our society" (Peterson, Alley and Gunn 42). There is value in this approach as it increases acceptance among children, expands their awareness of their identities and the identity of others, and provides the necessary foundation to build on as they age.

Robin Gabriel shared that it's important to emphasize "individuality and autonomy" as teachers integrate social justice into their teaching. Gabriel provides opportunities for students to critique books "by asking questions like, 'how would this story be different if it was about a little girl?' or simply by giving them space to talk about their lived experiences while we are reading our core story books, which then inspires more questions" (Gabriel). This inquiry and deconstruction further probes the Identity domain of the Social Justice Framework in an age-appropriate way. It likely encourages more discussion at home as students tell their families about the events and learning that occurred in their day.

The second and third grade parents were excited to see videos of their children pretending to be superheroes. Parents didn't quite make the connection that the superheroes themselves were activists; but the students knew that their superheroes were taking action in their community. We didn't complete the proposed lesson plan in its entirety. As suggested, the portion we did use preceded a play I wrote about the environment. In the play, young people were activists taking a stand for their community.

I approached the fourth and fifth grade spoken word curriculum, with full confidence. Maybe too much confidence. This grade level is where I met the most resistance and realized that I didn't have a true understanding of what my community was ready to handle. Their self-selected spoken word topics ranged from puppies to transphobia, from littering to racism, and homelessness to ISIS. Although parents and teachers were informed about the topics being covered in each class, they were not ready to hear young children speak on such serious topics. They weren't ready to hear children speak boldly about their awareness of the racism they have experienced and will continue to experience. About their knowledge of terrorism and their innocent pleading "You have a choice, don't you know that?". They could not find comfort in their discomfort. Au, Bigelow and Karp recognizes, as I did, that the degree of information presented to children will vary depending on the age. "Additionally, conventional wisdom regarding what young children are capable of processing makes many teachers understandably leery about venturing into such serious topics" (169-170).

Ultimately administration supported the exploration of self-selected topics but suggested that we have more discussion with the children about who their audience is and how we convey the message across in a way that will be received. Not every parent was that forgiving and understanding, and not even every teacher was that understanding. In *Signs of Change,* Lazarus

shares that socially responsible theatre can be challenging, but that it's important to begin and continue the work, raise questions and point to solutions, and stay strong in the face of "skeptics, cynics or naysayers" (174). My co-teacher and I still continued our work in our Year of Impact, despite the opposition we knew we would face. We began the work, continued the work, we raised questions, and our students pointed to solutions. The most challenging piece was to stay strong. There were days when we wanted to break down and cry. And sometimes we did. It was and still is confusing that this work, which is vital, can be so easily contested by fear. Social justice education takes a lot of strength because not everyone will see its value and there is no one precise method to convey the material.

How do we do it?

There are several considerations for infusing social justice work in a theatre arts curriculum, or any curriculum for that matter. Bentley suggests using language that is meaningful to the children, honoring and valuing their words, being brave and honest as you respond to their questions, recognizing that children are different and have different ways of participating, honoring that children need time to process the concepts (197, 199-200). Theatre classrooms offer plenty of opportunities for discussion, analysis, and writing. As we read and deconstruct scripts about historical events or other cultures, we can create opportunities for questioning and critical thinking. A flipped classroom, where the reading or watching of videos is completed at home in order to make time for classroom discussion is also an effective tool. Thinking routines such as Think, Pair, Share allow students to practice listening and respect differing opinions.

Of course Bentley's tips do not exist in isolation. In order to move "Classroom practices that move beyond rhetoric to substance…", Au, Bigelow, and Karp suggest ensuring that the curriculum is:

1. *Grounded in the lives of our students.*
2. *Critical. …*
3. *Multicultural, antiracist, and projustice….*
4. *Participatory and experiential. …*
5. *Hopeful, joyful, kind, and visionary….*
6. *Activist….*
7. *Academically rigorous*
8. *Culturally sensitive* (169).

The authors go so far as to say that students should be involved in role plays and simulations, which aligns perfectly with a theatre arts curriculum. To clarify, a "hopeful, joyful, kind, and visionary" curriculum does not preclude the difficult issues that need to be addressed for a well-rounded experience (169). It simply means that within the context of the challenging issues, that students can complete a unit or topic, knowing that they are cared for and children learn to express and reciprocate that care (169). Lazarus also asks thought-provoking questions in her book:

> How am I using the implicit political nature of theatre to engage students and the community? How am I using theatre as a catalyst for civic dialogue? How am I inviting multi-perspective responses to our work? In what ways does the program reach beyond the school? Does this work lead to awareness, action, or change? (124)

Lazarus doesn't shy away from the inherent "political nature of theatre" (124). Neither should we. A healthy political debate presents multiple perspectives and promotes dialogue – imagine the democracy that could exist if we taught our young children to value multiple perspectives as we move toward positive change in our world. Theatre productions can easily reach beyond the school by virtue of touring a show or bringing a show to a school. Recall Prendergrast's experience as an audience member for a play about the wetlands (21)? Maybe every production won't result in "awareness, action, or change" (124), but if one production creates an awareness in one child then we have done our job as educators.

It Starts with the Teachers

There is always a need for change in the world; theatre and education have always been a part of preparing people to participate in that process. Author and Professor Emeritus Juliana Saxton echoed that sentiment. "Social activism is about change ... surely a classroom is about change? Taking students from where they're at and moving them somewhere else. Theatre in education has always been about change" (Prendergast 20). That is essentially the heart of social justice education. I would add to Saxton's comment, surely a theatre classroom is about change. It is a space where students have the opportunity to explore a culture or concept that they might not have been exposed to before and not just read about it but recreate it. Give it life and see another perspective that is different from their own. That is "Taking students from where they're at and moving them somewhere else" (Prendergast 20). Children should not leave our classrooms on the last day of school, the same way they entered on the first day of school.

Outside of this paper, it may be difficult to obtain a clear definition of social justice. It is beneficial to define what social justice education means to you and for your school. Is the purpose to create active citizens (personally-responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented) that

work to achieve equity making a democratic society a just society? Hytten and Bettez note the confusion and support a better understanding or common definition that "can hopefully contribute to opening up new angles for seeing and new possibilities for engaging each other across differing passions, commitments and agendas" (Hytten and Bettez, Understanding Education for Social Justice). We enter the field of education to help and guide children, not to cause them damage or harm. With that, we have to consider what is age-appropriate for various ages. Lazarus raises an interesting question with no clear answer: "What is the balance between what is age-appropriate, what is socially responsible, and what is culturally relevant?" (154). Teachers, parents and administrators can argue this question to death, but it shouldn't stop them from beginning and doing the work. As we encourage students to trust and care for each other, we have to model that trust and care as educators working for a common goal.

Fear not only holds us back, but it holds our students back. What I am asking is that we consider a type of education that most of us did not receive. That type of change doesn't come easily. We likely teach in a way that is similar to a teacher that we admire or consistent experiences that we were exposed to. Those experiences might have been high quality, but that likely lacked a social justice infusion. After Hubbard and Hilboldt Swain interviewed kindergarten through sixth grade teachers about teaching and being taught about the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), they revealed some deeper truths about these teachers. The teachers in question consciously shielded children from events in history where the "U.S. was not the hero or where U.S. citizens were responsible for harmful actions" (220). They unintentionally deprived their students of the opportunity to "discuss, debate, and extend their questions into 'deeper' understandings of historically significant events and the beliefs and intentions behind them" (220). As if that was not enough, these same teachers realized that their own elementary

teachers "damaged and limited" their knowledge and understanding of the CRM (220). They mimicked this same teaching style with their children.

The unintentional damage and limitations can happen in private or public schools, traditional or progressive. It is nothing but a vicious cycle that educators must open their eyes to in order to affect change. We have to realize that "Students have the means to reach their own conclusions about history when they grapple with various sources presenting conflicting evidence and interpretations. Then they generate expanded thinking and reasoning related to contemporary issues" (Hubbard and Hilboldt Swain 230). No well-meaning teacher wants to prevent the development of critical thinking and reasoning, however, when we hold back information and prevent the scaffolding of social justice work we are undermining the very concept of global citizenship that most schools claim to develop.

A public school may not be able to adopt these proposals as they stand because typically public schools and some private schools don't have as much freedom as independent schools. However, as I said in the Introduction, this proposal is not an all-or-nothing approach. If the umbrella of social justice is too progressive of an idea to broach with your constituents, you can still explore the spokes of the umbrella so children can develop into active citizens. For example, a preschool and pre-kindergarten program can explore multiculturalism; kindergarten and first grade students can explore identity and the acceptance needed as you explore diverse identities; second and third grade students should be exposed to an inclusive curriculum especially after they have a better understanding of their personal identity and how it fits into a multicultural world; and finally fourth and fifth grade students can explore equity in their community and beyond as they realize they are able to take action and make difference in their world.

Gabriel, also a teacher, notes that teachers are not neutral in social justice education. "I am complicit in whatever leadership actions are taken in the classroom" (2014). Taking responsibility for our actions or lack of actions is key. We can do this work and value the opinions in the room. We can do this work and value the beautiful and ugly history of this country. Most importantly, we can do this work and value the young, malleable minds of the citizens of today that we have before us. When we pair this vital work with an already diverse craft that many children love, we open doors for them to communicate, inquire and express themselves in ways that the traditional classroom does not always allow. Theatre education naturally pairs with social justice education – it always has and always will.

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A NATURAL PAIRING: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THEATRE EDUCATION

A thesis submitted to the College of Letter and Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education in Theatre Education

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2018

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